

CORRESPONDENCE

Deterrents to Parenthood

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—It is possible that there may be an automatic evolutionary solution to the problem raised by Dr. Piney in your last issue.

Except in the last two or three generations children have been an almost inevitable accompaniment of marriage. Now, in those capable of using contraceptives effectively, family size is largely determined by the strength of parental instinct, that is the desire to have and bring up children. Since this instinct has only undergone strong selection recently it is not unnatural that many individuals are deficient in it; one expression of that deficiency being the unwillingness to sacrifice present happiness for the sake of posterity, which Dr. Piney finds to be common.

In general it is likely, and a matter for congratulation, that such individuals are not likely to perpetuate their deficiency either by the transmission of its genetic component or by parental influence.

Those with strong parental instinct will not be much affected by fears of the loss of spousely companionship or of the many other disadvantages involved in having a large family.

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—I do not think that Dr. Carter's suggestions give any ground for hoping that a solution of the falling birth-rate problem will be brought about by natural selection.

Family size is not, in my opinion, "largely determined by the strength of parental instinct." A far more potent factor is the fear of falling in the social scale because of the expense of a large family; and an almost equally effective deterrent is public opinion. The contempt often shown to the mother of a large family is striking and, to her, distressing. Fashion is rather more likely to be a factor in family size than is commonly realized.

The existence of a "parental instinct" is very far from being proved: the sexual instinct is a very different matter. There is, thus, no reason, except baseless optimism, for Dr. Carter's supposition that things will rectify themselves by the automatic extinction of those who are poorly endowed with a desire for present discomfort and who are uninterested in posterity.

In conclusion, I would point out that the revolt against parenthood is no new thing. My previous quotation was some 200 years old; and even earlier *The Spectator* (No. 583, Vol. 8) had said: "We are always doing something for Posterity, but I would fain see Posterity do something for us."

Sir, I would reiterate that, without some new and at present inconceivable stimulus, the birth rate will continue to fall; without a new philosophy of life there is no reason for the sane to trust their "necks to gripe of noose."

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

DEAR SIR,—The information presented—largely statistically—in your pages with regard to the forces that are affecting both the quality and quantity of the births occurring inside civilization is of immense importance and value. But is it not possible to claim that this very natural reliance on figures is not all that should affect our conclusions? Reproduction depends on the exercise of functions upon which there is so much diffidence and suppression that the collection of statistics that are reliable must be—at least in some aspects—extremely difficult. In so much, therefore, that relates to the matters in which we are particularly concerned we are left too much to the revelations made to those who act as father confessors—with a consequent necessity of concealing their knowledge. It is tempting to the generous-minded to attribute an undue value to economic forces. If we can persuade ourselves that an improvement in material conditions will ensure a corresponding advance in the average intelligence it enables us to hope that we shall one day, and that a not very distant one, have what is called an educated people. Now no one ought to minimize the very great importance of economic forces. Indeed, there is no likelihood of any considerable number of advanced people doing that at the present time. The tendency is too much the other way, and that tendency calls for someone to emphasize the other forces that are at work.

Let me put it as it appears to me. The same benevolent enthusiasm that makes the value of economic forces so attractive to us, because they imply that the achievement of social justice will be rewarded by an improvement in the peoples who enjoy it, includes in this social justice the extension to women of every facility for higher education. It not only appeals to a sense of social justice but to a very strong instinctive chivalry. Hence that anyone should question the unalloyed good of this policy of education seems to most generous-minded people as something like a superfluity of naughtiness. Many of these people claim to have scientific minds, and to me that means that they claim to look facts in the face without being blinded by prejudice or sentiment. It is to be feared that this claim is not always borne out by the actions of those who make it. Even if we do see other causes at work beside the economic or recog-

nize that there are some things in the matter besides statistics, we are all tempted to avoid putting them forward since they seem to debit us with an ungenerousness that is contemptible.

Yet what is our demur? Is it the invention of some entirely illusory theory? What we say is that we have noticed that the student habit in women aborts the sexual instinct and consequently removes from the field of reproduction the very best type of mother. That is the emotional and psychological aspect. On the economic side we find that the better off people become, the lower falls their birth rate, so that the prospect in that direction is no more comforting than that seen in the other just mentioned.

These remarks are confined to the effect of emotional and economic causes on the birth rate of the best types. But if by our enquiries we are seeking to find a happier social order, and that is the justification for our policy, can we be said to make for this happiness by ensuring that nearly every marriage of one of the better types of women is a disaster to her husband? Indeed, we may accompany this with an immense improvement in the environment of that husband; but will that outcome of our stressing the importance of economics compensate for a permanently unhappy marriage? Will it compensate the nation for the steady reduction in the intelligence of its members? I have seen these marriages. My opinion is that a dinner of herbs and love therewith is very much better than the stalled ox of improved economic conditions, if along with them is sacrifice and strife.

Of course it can be contended that it is an advantage that we are heading for a population of dull mentality. If we make higher education accessible to all, if all could profit by it then there would be such a demand for the black-coated jobs of society and such an incapacity to supply that demand that we should have a population suffering from such a sense of frustration as to make certain that the new order would not be happier than the old. Thus a

prominent medical man never tires of impressing on me the very great importance of securing a sufficiency of mental defect in the people if we are to get the world's work done. It is a disappointing prospect. Society without intelligence or marriage without love. If some way out of the dilemma could be found it would be welcomed by those who, in spite of wishful thinking, have been compelled to recognize disagreeable facts.

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Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—At a time when many specialized libraries have been removed from London it may interest your readers to hear that a new one has been established for the use of members of the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency. Psychiatry, general psychology, psycho-analysis, sociology, criminology, child study and kindred subjects are well represented, and it is hoped that the success of the scheme will warrant a further expenditure on books before long. The pamphlet and report section is especially useful as many important contributions to science first make their appearance in this form.

The library represents an extension of the educational work which this Institute undertakes in addition to its clinical activities. Many who cannot attend lectures will now find it possible to undertake prescribed courses of reading, and arrangements for group membership in connection with such studies have already been made with several organizations. I shall be pleased to send further particulars to those who are interested.

IRENE M. JAMES,

General Secretary.

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Edited by W. C. ALLEE, Professor of Zoölogy, The University of Chicago. Published Quarterly by the University of Chicago Press.

Subscription : 35s. 2d. per year.

English Agents : **CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS**